

DOCUMENTING FREEDOM IN AFRICA

A series of new interviews with prominent recording artists, activists and citizens is now available on the audiovisual archive [Documenting African Freedom](#). Curated with the rapper and activist **Xuman** and conducted by **Phyllis Taoua**, the interviews filmed in Dakar, Senegal, explore the meaning of freedom in African languages and contexts.

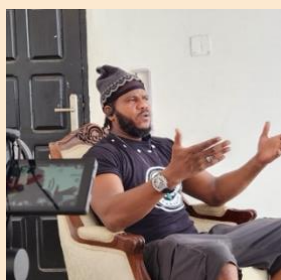


Recording Artists

DJ Awadi (Didier Awadi)—A pioneering figure of African hip hop, Awadi launched Positive Black Soul (PBS) in 1989 with Dugee Tee. Rapping in French, English and Wolof, they helped forge Hip Hop Galsen. Awadi toured internationally, signed with leading labels (Island Records, Sony Music) and has recorded with major artists from MC Solaar and Wyclef Jean to Youssou N’Dour. Based in Dakar where he was born, he currently runs a production studio and rehearsal space, Studio Sankara. On freedom, Awadi talked about lyrics in Senegalese hip hop and offered his short list of the most influential songs by PBS, Bob Marley, Johnny Clegg, Youssou N’Dour, Alpha Blondy, Tikken Jah Fakoly and Ismaël Lô.

Xuman (Makhtar Fall)—A visionary rapper and activist, Xuman launched the pioneering rap group Pee Froiss in 1993 that inspired the next generation. Born in Ivory Coast to a family of Senegalese origin, he is now based in Dakar and was a supporter of the citizen-led movement Y’en a marre (Fed UP). In 2013, he created the popular *Journal Rappé* with fellow rapper Keyti. On freedom, Xuman talked about the inter-generational impact of Pee Froiss and said that Africans are not free if they don’t have their art objects in their own museums and if they don’t print their own currency.

Keyti (Cheikh Sène)—Senegalese rapper, Wolof poet and co-creator of *Journal Rappé* with Xuman, Keyti launched the influential group Rap’adio in 1998 and then went solo forging his own voice as a modern master of the spoken word in Wolof. Born in Saint Louis, he has been based in Dakar. On freedom, he reflected on his process of translating related ideas (human rights, United Nations) into Wolof phrases in his lyrics and his sources of inspiration.



Thiat (Cyrille Touré)—Born in Kaolack and based in Dakar, Thiat is a human rights and pro-democracy activist as well as a politically engaged rapper. In 2000, he launched the rap group Keur Gui with Kilifeu and was a founding member of the citizen-led movement Y’en a marre (Fed UP) in 2011. On freedom, Thiat cited Pee Froiss’s influence on him and his generation and reflected on his decades of experience as an activist arrested 16 times and detained in prison 5 times.

Fou Malade (Malal Talla)— Born in Saint Louis, Fou Malade is a Senegalese rapper, activist and cultural icon. He is currently based in the suburbs of Dakar where he runs Guédiawaye Hip Hop Association, a community center. A popular musician with a media presence, Fou Malade is an activist who was also a founding member of the citizen-led movement Y'en a marre (Fed UP). On freedom, he talked about using his individual freedom to build a community with shared prosperity and equal opportunities and to support youth at risk in Guédiawaye.



Moonaya (Awa Mounaya Yanni)—Born in Cotonou, Benin, into a family with roots in Togo, Nigeria and France, this pathbreaking artist launched her recording career in 2004 and was the first female rapper from Senegal to sign with Sony Music in 2017. She studied law, speaks several languages and lives in Dakar where she writes innovative lyrics from a unique, compelling perspective. On freedom, she talked about how essential the idea is to her sense of self as a woman from her ability to make choices for herself to the lyrics of her songs.



Activists, Citizens

Babacar Sall—Dakar, Senegal. Director of Cultural Programs in the Mayor's Office. He emphasized the ideas of citizenship, democracy, rights and living within a community and described how multifaceted the word freedom is in Wolof.

Paul Dominique Corea—Dakar, Senegal. Human Rights activist with UNESCO and Forum Civil. He described freedom as the capacity of an individual to take charge of their life and evoked the ideas of responsibility, citizenship and rights citing as examples Léopold Sédar Senghor, Alioune Diop and Cheick Anta Diop.

Marie-Hélène Ndiaye—Dakar, Senegal. Humanist and elected political official in Dalifort, a suburb of the capital city. She said that freedom only exists insofar as it is protected by law and observed by society. She aspires to equal opportunities for men and women as a foundation for meaningful freedom in practice.

Usman Turey—Born in Saint Louis, Senegal, he currently works and resides in Dakar, Senegal. He said he feels free as an individual but hears from fellow citizens that they do not feel free.

Denise Sofiatou Sow—Kaolack, Senegal. Human Rights activist and social media guru, Denise was a founding member of the citizen-led movement Y'en a marre (Fed Up) in 2011. She emphasized the urgent need to protect freedom of expression and the human rights of activists to express their dissent in Senegal today.

Damel Diakhaté—Born in Joal, Senegal, he is a master’s student in linguistics at the University of Cheick Anta Diop in Dakar. He said he does not feel free to define his life as he would like as an individual and that peaceful protest is needed to defend the cause of collective freedoms in Senegal.

Ramatoulaye Mballo—Born in Paris, France, Ramatoulaye is a feminist of Senegalese origin based in Dakar working to build transnational networks of solidarity for African women within an international organization with a West African office in Accra, Ghana. She talked about the meaning of freedom in Pulaar and reflected on women’s freedoms and their paths to emancipation.

Clara Randimbiarimanana—Antananarivo, Madagascar. A doctoral student in anthropology at the University of Arizona, Clara studies how traditional fishing communities in Madagascar and Senegal adapt to a changing climate. She discussed freedom in Malagasy and its relation to the idea of political independence and emancipation.



Acknowledgements: Funded by CERCLL Faculty Research Grant at the University of Arizona. Filming and editing by Mouride Diop and Aurélie Mouzet with assistance by Badara Diop. Website by COH computing at the University of Arizona. Mariame Sy at Columbia University assisted with orthography. Photos by Aurélie Mouzet and Phyllis Taona.